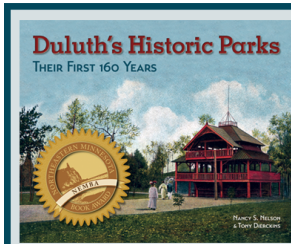


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THOMAS STOREY



Thomas J. Storey poses with mounts, c. 1920. (Image: University of Minnesota Duluth Kathryn A. Martin Library Archives and Special Collections)

For much of its life, Duluth's Storey Taxidermist along East Sixth Street was operated by Thomas J. Storey, one of two sons of Dr. Thomas Henry Storey who followed their father into the family trade. The elder Storey was himself a taxidermist but became better known as an early practitioner of chiropractic medicine who is both credited with inventing a vital tool of the trade and discredited for his controversial—and sometimes paralyzing—adjustment techniques.

A Family of Taxidermists

Born in Ontario, Canada, in 1843, Thomas H. Storey established himself as a taxidermist in Duluth in the 1880s (a 1952 advertisement for the business includes the phrase “Since 1882”) and by 1890 was operating a taxidermy business out of 28 East Superior Street under the name Storey & Williams, reflecting his brief partnership with William H. Williams.

Storey (and possibly Williams) contributed to the taxidermy exhibit representing Duluth and St. Louis County at the 1893 World's Exhibition in Chicago. In an 1893 letter to the *Duluth News Tribune*, Duluthian Ralph McKenzie reported what he had observed at the event, stating that “In the Minnesota building J. F. Storey, the Duluth taxidermist, has a complete display of specimens of Minnesota birds and animals... [as well as] one of the largest mooses [sic] upon record...[and] a specimen of the largest elk on record, which for a long time adorned one of the front windows of a Duluth drug store...occupies a place of honor here in the taxidermist collection.” We can only assume that Mr. McKenzie was mistaken about Storey's initials, and indeed records show Thomas H. Storey listed among members of the Minnesota Board of World's Fair Managers.

A 1909 advertisement for Thomas J. Storey—who was running for alderman at the time—states that he had been a practicing taxidermist for 20 years, which meant he entered the family business in 1889 when he was just 14 years old. His younger brother Frank also started in the trade at an early age. Storey Taxidermist later

moved to 227 East Superior Street—one of the buildings that was replaced by the Hotel Duluth in 1926—and stayed until 1921, when the business moved to 611 Sixth Avenue East. It has stayed there ever since.

From Talented Taxidermist to Controversial Chiropractor

Thomas J. took over the family business from his father in 1897, the same year Thomas H. began calling himself “doctor” and first advertised he was practicing as a “vitapathic physician.” Vitapathic medicine was developed by John Bunyan Campbell, who established the American Health College in Cincinnati in 1874. According to Brian A. Smith, the author of an article about Thomas Storey that appeared in the December, 1999, issue of *Chiropractic History*, Campbell wrote his own textbooks and “taught his students how to introduce into an ailing body the therapeutic agent of ‘vita’ which would restore them to health.” The article continues:

Akin to magnetic healing, vitapathy also encompassed the use of many folk-medicine approaches. Campbell believed the healing power came in at the crown of the head and, as hair was a non conductor, the patient must part his or her hair in the middle. The students were forbidden to divulge the contents of his books or to show his books to anyone.

The practice was regarded as quackery. In 1889 the journal *Medical World* called Campbell’s college “one of the most reprehensible developments of medical humbuggery.” Campbell also patented devices to deliver vitapathic treatments, including one appliance designed for “the electric extraction of poisons.”

Thomas H. Storey did not attend Campbell’s college, and his claim of graduating from McGill University’s Medical College “appears to be fabricated.” Just two years into his practice as a vitapathic physician, Storey faced charges of practicing medicine without a license when he tried to cure a young Duluth woman of typhoid fever by giving her a vapor bath and applying electric shocks to her hands, feet, and other parts of the body. Storey was fortunate: the case was dismissed. The following year he received a degree of “Diplomat or Doctor of Osteopathy” from Chicago’s National College of Osteopathy in 1900. Smith’s article calls the school a “diploma mill.”

Storey obtained another questionable degree from another questionable institution—the Palmer School and Infirmary of Chiropractic—in 1901, this one stating he was “competent to teach and practice” chiropractic medicine. This was about the time Storey may have developed the bifid table—a table in two parts that allows a patient to lie comfortably while face down—variations of which continue to be used at chiropractic offices throughout the world. According to Smith, Palmer School founder D. D. Palmer credits the table’s invention to “Dan Reisland or T. H. Storey.” Reisling was another Duluthian and a student of both Palmer’s and Storey’s. Smith argues Palmer’s statement locates “the invention of the bifid table in Duluth, Minnesota, prior to May 15, 1902.”

Storey also taught Reisland the “mallet-and-chisel” method of adjusting the spine. Just as it sounds, Storey placed wooden sticks or “chisels” against certain vertebrae and whacked them with a mallet in an attempt to realign the spine. According to Smith, Palmer was “not an enthusiastic supporter” of the method—he, like many of his contemporaries, he believed that true chiropractic methods did not involve manipulation by devices other than the hand (Storey is known among chiropractors today as the “father of instrument adjusting”). Reisling would later found an association that became the first American Chiropractic Association. He would also face charges after paralyzing a patient lower limbs while using the mallet-and-chisel method—as would his mentor.



A drawing of Dr. Storey's "hanging cure" apparatus that appeared in the *Los Angeles Daily Times* July 19, 1905. (Image: Public Domain)

California's First Chiropractor?

Smith's article contains a detailed account of Storey's life and questionable medical career, which begins to take an even odder turn in 1902 shortly after the death of his infant granddaughter. Storey wrote his wife a quick note, withdrew several thousand dollars from the bank, and disappeared. He ended up in Seattle, found "acting strangely" on a train. He next sent word to Palmer that he was heading to Los Angeles. Worried, Palmer went after him and was fortunate to spot Storey on a streetcar, "his face was bloated; an eye blackened from a bruise; his clothing was

soiled and unkept.” Storey told his friend that he had been under the control of “the other fellow” and described what we might today consider symptoms of multiple-personality disorder or perhaps schizophrenia. His last memory was speaking to his son in Duluth and he had no idea how he ended up in California.

During Storey’s disappearance his office was broken into no less than three times. He never returned to the Zenith City. Thomas and Frank stayed in Duluth, both working as taxidermists, while other siblings followed their father west. In Los Angeles Storey started practicing his unique healing methods almost immediately (Smiths suggests that this possibly makes Storey the first practicing chiropractor in California). Besides electricity and the mallet-and-chisel technique, Storey also began using the “hanging cure,” suspending patients by their head in order to straighten their spines.

By 1905 Los Angeles authorities were attempting to convict Storey of practicing without a license. A young man who fell off a bridge and damaged his spine sought pain relief from Storey, who applied the hanging cure and repeatedly hit the patient in the neck to force the broken bones into position. After the patient collapsed, Storey applied electricity. By the time the treatment was over, his patient was a “hopeless cripple,” paralyzed from the waist down.

Storey was subsequently charged and found guilty of practicing without a license. An appeal was denied and in the end he was fined \$500, about \$13,000 today. He continued his controversial practice. In 1907 he used the mallet-and-chisel method to adjust Domenick Premus and cure him of “some type of kidney and liver ailment;” Premus died within an hour of the treatment.

Storey fled to Mexico to avoid prosecution, but eventually returned at the urging of his family. His defense was thin, as his attorney—Miss Philaletha S. Michelson—actually hoped for a guilty verdict so that she could appeal the case in a higher court. Storey was found guilty and sentenced to 60 days in jail and again fined \$500. Michelson appealed, arguing in part that because he used tools—not just the hands—

to manipulate the spine, Storey was practicing osteopathy, not chiropractic. According to Smith, “For reasons unknown, the Superior Court agree with some or all of Michelson’s appeal and overturned the verdict.”

Encouraged by the outcome of the appeal, in 1909 the 66-year-old Storey established the California College of Chiropractic, aka the “Storey School of Chiropractic” and the “Thomas Storey School and Cure.” But aside from its board of directors (which included Storey’s attorney), Smith could find no information regarding the institute; the school was never listed in Los Angeles city directories and it does not appear on a 1920 list of California’s chiropractic schools. The school did have one noted graduate: Charles A. Cale, founder of the Los Angeles College of Chiropractic, which, according to Smith, is today “one of the largest chiropractic educational institutes in the world.”

Thomas H. Storey died in 1923 with his estate in shambles. It took many years and the efforts of several attorneys to straighten out the chiropractor’s estate.

The Rest of the Storey Taxidermist Story

After his father became a vitapathic physician in 1897, Thomas J. Storey took over the family business and remained a taxidermist the rest of his life. Frank Storey also kept at the family trade, working with Thomas on Superior Street until at least 1914. He later operated his own taxidermy business out of his home at 2518 West Third Street. Frank Storey died in 1954.

In September 1937 the *Duluth Herald* ran an article about Thomas J. Storey, who at the time had been contacted by the Smithsonian Institute, which was looking for stuffed specimens of record-sized fish. The Smithsonian, Chicago’s Field Museum, and the National Geographic Society had all taken notice of the quality of Storey’s work and his technique—inspired by rag dolls—of using saw dust for the “stuffing” of his mounted fish. The method gave his work a much more lifelike quality.

Although records are not clear, Thomas J. Storey likely passed away in 1948, the same year George Flaim purchased Storey Taxidermist. Flaim operated the business for 30 years before selling to Jim Hagstrom, Sr., in 1978. Hagstrom still operates Storey Taxidermist, although on a limited basis.

Story by Maryanne C. Norton (<http://zenithcity.com/information/>). Originally published on *Zenith City Online* (2012–2017). Click here (<http://zenithcity.com/author/mcnorton/>) for more stories by Maryanne C. Norton.

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